

deputy director for management, said that day.

That provides scant comfort to employees such as Devorah Shapiro, 30, who has worked at the hospital scullery for 10 years and worries what will happen if she loses her job.

"I like working here," Shapiro said the other day while taking a break from the first half of her eight-hour shift. "I work on the belt. I help push carts upstairs sometimes. I wash plates, pick silverware—I do everything."

Shapiro landed the job after interning at the hospital while a student at Rock Terrace School, a public campus in Rockville that serves 112 special-needs children in grades 6 through 12. "I live in a group home and I have to pay the rent there," said Shapiro, her dark curls tucked neatly under a hairnet. "And I have to work, or else they'll ask me to leave. I don't want to leave my friends. I don't want to leave my house. It's too nice."

The work isn't easy. The employees, clad in blue uniforms and white plastic aprons, remove trash and utensils from used trays as they navigate across a water-slicked red tile floor. Many wear earplugs to block out the drone of the industrial dishwasher that cleans the dishes and trays that pass through it on a conveyor belt before the workers retrieve and stack them in neat piles. Shifts begin at 5:30 a.m. and finish as late as 7 p.m.

James Eastridge, 38, another former Rock Terrace student, has worked in the kitchen for 22 years. That is long enough for him to earn several promotions and enough money to buy a house in Hagerstown, where he lives with his parents.

"I started out when I was 16 years old and just kept on working; the years just flew by," he said. "I hope we get to keep the jobs. When I was in school, I was pretty wild. They got me in the job . . . and I've been doing good ever since I've been here."

Randy Severt, a teacher at Rock Terrace, said more than 300 students have interned or worked at the hospital since the school formed a partnership with the institution in 1979. The Navy got reliable, long-serving employees for hard-to-fill positions. The students, who earn between \$9.42 and \$12.80 an hour, were given an opportunity to work, learn about money management and become more self-sufficient.

Providing such opportunities is a long-standing goal of the federal government. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 banned discrimination against disabled people in federal hiring and required agencies to develop affirmative action plans to hire more people with disabilities.

Most of the scullery workers joined the hospital under a federal hiring authority that allows agencies to take on people with mental retardation as provisional employees, then convert them to permanent status after two years of satisfactory service. The government employed 1,734 mentally retarded workers in 2000, about one-tenth of 1 percent of the 1.8 million-strong federal civilian workforce, according to the Office of Personnel Management. (Overall, more than 120,000 disabled people worked for the government that year, more than 7 percent of the federal workforce.)

If the hospital scullery work goes to a private contractor, it will mean a big adjustment for a group of workers who, due to circumstances and disability, do not cope well with change, Severt said.

"They have problems finding jobs on their own. They don't advocate well for themselves and they don't have a lot of skills," Severt said. "Some of them can speak well. Some of them have very good social skills. But they are retarded, and they need help every step of the way. They just don't adapt."

Hospital officials say the quality of the work isn't at issue. "They're very loyal employees," said Cmdr. Martie Slaughter, the hospital's nutrition manager. "I've only been here for two years and they are like my family."

In similar competitions across the government, the in-house bid has triumphed more than half the time, according to the OMB. Even in the cases where the private sector has won, the employees often have gone to work for the contractor. But the scullery employees are at a decided disadvantage.

"If you are special needs, you have a great need for greater supervision," Slaughter said. "And we all know that supervision costs money."

Jerry Leener, whose son Mike, 27, has worked at the hospital for eight years, said that even a White House focused on the bottom line should realize there is little to be gained by contracting out the work. Displaced employees would turn to government entitlement programs, including federal disability payments, Medicaid and food stamps. "If our kids lose their jobs, the federal government is still going to have to compensate them," Leener said. "Either way, it's going to be coming out of federal funds. So we haven't had a cost saving as it relates to these kids. What's more, we've displaced them from their passion. They love working here. They love being a part of this."

Military officials have been sympathetic but unmoved. Slaughter said that early on in the process she asked about getting a waiver for the workers, but none was forthcoming. Over the last year, parents of some workers have written to Navy officials and members of Congress seeking help, but with no concrete results.

As recently as two weeks ago, Navy officials said they were still studying the situation. Parents of the workers grew nervous as a December deadline loomed for the hospital to submit its bid to keep the scullery jobs in-house. They were told that a decision on whether a contractor would take over could come as soon as March.

Then on Oct. 2, 10 days after Van Hollen's visit to the scullery and after inquiries by The Washington Post, Navy officials passed the word internally that they had been directed to temporarily stop working on the job competition. "The study has not been cancelled, but postponed until further notice," an internal e-mail said.

Parents said they were given a vague explanation that the job competition had gone on longer than current law permits. A provision in the recently passed 2004 Defense Appropriations bill blocks new funding for single-function job competitions that have exceeded 24 months, and multifunction competitions that have exceeded 30 months. Navy officials at the hospital did not respond to two requests for more information about the decision.

"I have a suspicion that they were starting to feel political pressure and decided to put it on hold, and that maybe this thing would blow over," said Leener, who added that he remains uncertain about whether his son's job is safe. "We took it as a big victory, believe me, but it's a temporary one."

Trent Duffy, an OMB spokesman, said agencies may cancel job competitions that jeopardize protected workers, such as veterans or disabled people. "It is permissible for agencies to make that determination and cancel a competition because these protected populations, these certain people, could potentially lose their livelihoods," Duffy said. "They absolutely have that discretion under the law." Van Hollen, who wrote a letter to Bush urging him to halt the study, said he viewed the Navy's decision as little more than political expediency. He still believes

competitive sourcing is "a one-size-fits-all contracting-out policy that does not take into account other important goals of the federal government," he said.

"I still think it's an example of their policy run amok," Van Hollen said. "There's no doubt what happened here. You want to applaud the Navy for reversing its decision, but you can't have a member of Congress or a member of the press visit every site where you've got . . . contracting out going on with model programs."

CONGRATULATIONS TO WESTINGHOUSE WARRIORS CITY BASKETBALL TITLE

HON. DANNY K. DAVIS

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, April 5, 2005

Mr. DAVIS of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, on February 26 the young men of George Westinghouse Career Academy High School's basketball team, lead by coach Quitman Dillard, won their fourth City Championship in the last six seasons.

The game was never really in doubt and second place Simeon could never get any closer than eight points in the second half.

By a score of 67-52, Westinghouse clinched their place at the top of the Chicago Public League, according to press reports, one of the Nation's top high school basketball proving grounds.

The 72 team Chicago City league is reportedly used by some college coaches as a benchmark for the success of their recruiting efforts.

The Westinghouse team was powered by DeAndre Thomas, rated by many as the best high school player in Illinois. Thomas scored 29 points, snagged 9 rebounds and had three assists.

However, the victory was definitely a team effort. Westinghouse had 23 assists.

Marquis Johnson scored 14 points and secured 11 rebounds. Kris Harris and Corey Caston each scored nine points. Caston had 7 assists.

Mr. Speaker, Westinghouse Career Academy, which serves the Austin, South Lawndale and West Garfield Communities, is a public school fighting its way to the top in every category.

Eighteen percent of its almost 1400 students are enrolled in honors classes. They were City champs in the C-CAP culinary arts competition.

Westinghouse students have earned nine medals in Academic Decathlon competition.

Tonight, Mr. Speaker, I salute Westinghouse Career Academy and Principal Dr. Lona C. Bibbs.

The Westinghouse Warriors are setting an example for the entire school by now setting their sights on the next task: the State finals. All Chicago wishes them the very best.

The Westinghouse Warriors have, through their hard work, their determination and their talent, achieved a remarkable record.

Congratulations to the Westinghouse team, their coach and to each of these outstanding young athletes individually.